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# LETTER DATED 14 JUNE 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter addressed to you from His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 14 June 1999 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have decided to write to you regarding the current situation in the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the preoccupation of my Government at the lack of progress in reaching a solution.

The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea has entered its second year. It has been a year of missed opportunities to secure a peaceful resolution of the dispute based on international law and the rejection of the use of force to settle disputes. Unfortunately, the opportunities were not utilized by the international community, forcing my country to take defensive action in February 1999 to successfully liberate part of the territory that had been forcefully occupied by Eritrea.

In recent days, I once again fear that the international community in general, and the United Nations Security Council in particular, are missing an important opportunity to contribute towards the fair settlement of the conflict.

This is because of the clear lack of political support given to the High-Level Delegation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), on whose behalf its chairman, H.E. Mr. Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso, called upon the Eritrean President in writing to withdraw from all Ethiopian territories that Eritrea had occupied since May 1998.

You do recall that, following its defeat at Badme last February, the Eritrean regime, while giving lip service to accepting the OAU proposals for a framework agreement, denied that it had been required by the proposals to withdraw from other territories that it had occupied a month later in June.

You will also remember that, despite the efforts of my Government to then explain what Eritrea was required to do and the need for international pressure to bring that about, some considered the refusal of Eritrea to withdraw and the impasse created as having been caused by differing interpretations of the Framework Agreement. We were repeatedly informed that unless OAU clarified what was meant by "Badme and its environs", it would not be possible to lean on any one party to take additional steps.

The absence of resolve to call upon Eritrea to withdraw from all the territories it occupied by force (as it was required to do), coupled with the lack of readiness of the Eritrean regime to reverse its aggression, no doubt encouraged Asmara to embark on repeated and futile efforts to regain the Badme area in late March and late May 1999.

It was, therefore, important for OAU to once again affirm its position and in the most explicit way to date. The OAU Chairman, on 11 May 1999, sent his envoy to Asmara with a written message clearly calling on Eritrea to withdraw from all Ethiopian territories that it had occupied over the past year.

This appropriate measure by OAU should have provided the possibility for all those concerned with the conflict, and more significant, the United Nations Security Council, to reinforce the OAU message and pin down the side that continued to resist any call to reverse its aggression.

However, the opportunity was frittered away when the President of the United Nations Security Council, following an informal meeting of the Council on 19 May 1999, issued a press statement devoid of any reference to the need for Eritrea to heed the voice of OAU. After having urged OAU to provide them with its interpretation of what was meant by "Badme and its environs", member States of the Council could not bring themselves to back OAU, thereby allowing Eritrea to believe that it could get away with staying put on Ethiopian territory.

I must believe that you will agree with me that any interpretation of the OAU Framework Agreement that suggests that Eritrea would withdraw from territories it occupied in May but retain those it occupied in June cannot be taken seriously. There is no rationale for Eritrea to withdraw only partially from territories that it has occupied by force.

The bottom line for Ethiopia is that Eritrea should and must withdraw from all occupied Ethiopian territories and that the Ethiopian administration - forcefully uprooted - should be restored. That is what the OAU Framework Agreement requires of Eritrea. Eritrea should accept this package and pave the way for its peaceful implementation.

Unfortunately the Eritrean leadership is showing no inclination to follow the path of peace. By declining to respond to OAU - in effect scuttling the efforts of the High-Level Delegation - Eritrea is hoping for a way out of being pinned down to the Framework Agreement. Eritrea's leaders are now heard expressing preference for others to handle the peace effort in an attempt to sidestep the uncomfortable position in which they have been placed in the implementation of an agreement they continue to have no intention of honouring.

It is indeed tragic that neither the Security Council nor others who are in a position to make a difference are yet prepared to play a meaningful, effective and fair role towards ending this crisis that no one can deny was imposed on Ethiopia. What Ethiopia has been made to witness so far has been a never-ending shifting of the goal posts designed to appease Asmara, the latest instances of which are the events now unfolding following the clarification provided to Eritrea by the Chairman of the High-Level Delegation. While this should have given all parties, including the Security Council, the opportunity to strengthen the OAU's hand by reiterating to Eritrea what has already been made clear by OAU, what we see is a complete abdication of responsibility and attempts once again to shift the goal post in anticipation of yet another concession from Ethiopia.

The conclusion that Ethiopia is made to draw from all this is clear - the victim of aggression cannot expect a fair deal, the OAU Framework Agreement is a peace document to which only lip service is given and the overriding concern is with finding ways of appeasing Eritrea by demanding never-ending concessions from the victim of aggression, which is known to have never rejected peace proposals from the outset.

Ethiopia's desire for peace is thus being frustrated by a combination of Eritrea's intransigence and lack of seriousness on one hand and by the international community's indifference and lack of even-handedness on the other.

It is in the light of the foregoing that we wish to appeal to you to help Ethiopia achieve peace, which has eluded us over the past year through no fault of ours. We are convinced that the international community can, if it wishes to, prevail upon Eritrea to respond positively to the latest OAU call on Eritrea to give peace a chance.

We call on the Security Council to give Eritrea a clear signal that we are governed by international law and that aggression cannot pay. The time to do so may be long overdue, but it is better late than never.

(Signed) Seyoum MESFIN
Minister for Foreign Affairs

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